

26 February 1987

FILE ONLY

GATES CONTACTS WHITE HOUSE MAY CLOUD PROSPECTS

BY TIME AHERN

WASHINGTON

Robert Gates, President Reagan's nominee to head the CIA, says he can't remember what he told White House aides last year at the time they were compiling a phony chronology of the Iran-Contra affair, the Senate Intelligence Committee said Thursday.

The statement by Gates may put his already troubled nomination in further jeopardy, said Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, vice-chairman of the panel.

"This could cause some trouble," said Cohen. "It's certainly something we'll want to look into more when we meet next week." Meantime, Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., also a member of the Intelligence Committee, said Reagan should withdraw Gates' nomination to replace William Casey. He was written to the White House to propose the withdrawal.

Specter, who praised the Tower commission, told a news conference that "my preference preference would be a withdrawal. In the absence of a withdrawal, it might be preferable to vote Mr. Gates down." Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, chairman of a Senate committee investigating the Iran-Contra affair, said, "it would be in the best interests of the Senate if we help up the nomination until we get more information." Sen. Warren Rudman, R-N.H., vice-chairman of the panel, said, "the Senate ought to do a little more inquiry before casting a vote" on Gates.

Asked if Reagan should withdraw the nomination, Rudman said, "I would not say that." Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., said Thursday, "We're not going to act in haste ... We're going to take this one step at a time." Gates, currently the deputy CIA director, was nominated to replace Casey in the wake of Casey's surgery for brain cancer. But Gates came under fire at Intelligence Committee confirmation hearings last week for his role in the Iran-Contra affair.

In a document released Thursday by the panel, Gates provided new information after the hearings about his involvement with fired White House aide Oliver North last November at the same time North was reportedly preparing a phony chronology of the Iran-Contra affair.

The written statement by Gates said that on Nov. 17, "my records show that I made a telephone call to Lt. Col. North at 1845 (6:45 p.m.). I have no record of the subject of that call," he said.

But he noted that almost two hours earlier, he had telephoned Casey, who was overseas, to urge Casey to return and testify before the Intelligence Committee as the panel was investigating the Iran-Contra dealings.

On Nov. 19, Gates wrote, he talked three more times to North in midday. He said he believed the calls were about Casey's testimony, but "there is no record and I do not remember specifically." Later on Nov. 19, Gates said, he met with other top officials to discuss Casey's testimony and "at that meeting, I repeated earlier guidance to get all the facts about CIA's role into the testimony." Gates said he would have told the panel earlier about his role, but he wasn't aware it would be interested.

"I regret that I did not foresee at the time that the committee would be interested not only in when I learned about the facts of our operational support role, but also the details of the process of assembling these facts, including relevant contacts with the NSC during the week of 17 November," he said.

He said the additional information "underscores the role I played that week in attempting to get accurate information before the committee."